



JOHN W. GARDNER
2100 M STREET N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037

BLK. RT.



Miss

Mr.

Mrs.

& Mrs.*

Membership

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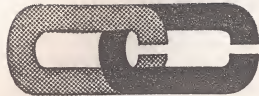
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It's possible that you have already received this letter. If that is so, we regret the duplication. It is the result of our using a number of lists. If you have already joined Common Cause, we would appreciate your passing along this letter to an interested friend or neighbor.

'Common Cause' Could Bring Political Reform

...live only when candidates or office-holders respond to pressure. The coalition Mr. Gardner envisions might be just the type that is needed to make the people who control the political organizations and institutions more responsive to the issues of our times.

There is little question that the parties and institutions are losing touch with many people. Young people are becoming alienated racial minorities are ambivalent

—Louisville Courier-Journal

...not just a strong one, not just a rich one, but a great society."

There are, of course, many disappointed and frustrated citizens who feel their individual efforts for better government have come to naught. With a united front, these citizens can now be heard . . . and perhaps in some instances, heeded.

Both political parties will a while and see how

—Wildwood (N.J.) Leader

...under the stress civil conflict. Gardner has perceived something few politicians are willing to admit publicly: disillusionment with "the system" is not confined to the college youths or radicals or blacks. Much of educated, affluent, middle-class America is equally turned off by government and politics today, distrustful of the ability or willingness of elected officials to meet the problems that plague America. As much as anything, Gardner is seeking to revive a hope and confidence in them.

It is a bold gamble he has taken, and of his own associates

—David Broder,
The Washington Post

...choices to their identity as members of a body politic that needs to work out these choices peaceably and cooperatively.

The tentative pick of a name for Gardner's effort — the Common Cause — is an apt one. Either we, the people, will find ways of pulling together, or we may well succeed in ripping apart what is left of the nation's social and political fabric.

—Roanoke (Va.) Times

...parties will adopt its goals as theirs and will respond to the people's wishes.

If as many people are as willing to go to work for a common cause as Gardner thinks there are, his movement's thrust could have everlasting benefits.

—Lincoln (Nebraska) Star

...economic actions to elaborate national problems.

That some such action is needed is beyond argument. The failures of national, state and local governments are too plain to need recording. Poor education, poverty, economic ills, student unrest, racial conflict and the foundering cities all speak of needs which are not being met by presently-constituted American institutions. John Gardner is as well qualified as any one in public life

...for constructive action on sound plans for a national revival.

We wish John Gardner well—because we wish the country well.

—Asheville (N.C.) Times

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Toward a Political Renaissance

(The New York Times)

Self-government thrives on the political vitality of individual citizens. Democracy cannot be left to those inevitable participants, the economic interest groups and the political careerists. If ordinary men and women do not care enough about some community—whether it be their own neighborhood or their nation or the great globe itself—to band together in new organizations determined to cut through the routines and the apathy, then self-government will slowly wither and ultimately die.

In the United States today, thousands of worthy organizations push for progress in particular fields—organizations as diverse as Citizens for Clean Air, the United Nations Association and Planned Parenthood. But there is also a sense of impatience with both the major political parties, a widely felt need to revitalize political life and invest it with fresh moral significance, new intellectual content, new leadership.

The more spectacular responses to this need are naturally the best known. There is, for example, the demagogic effort of the Wallace movement to unite old racial bigotry with a neo-Populist appeal to the economic dissatisfactions of many working-class and middle-class people. There are the revolutionary posturings of some students and some blacks who denounce "the system" and insist that the normal political channels are no longer navigable. There is the Conservative party in New York which offers a bleak version of nineteenth-century individualism and laissez-faire as the true escape route from the wearisome complexities of late twentieth-century society.

But there are many other, more promising stirrings. Millions of young people, on and off the campuses, have not despaired of this country and its peaceful, democratic values. They are eager to put their idealism and energy in the service of constructive political change. The McCarthy candidacy of 1968 and the Lindsay campaign last year cut across normal party allegiances. The many new organizations working on environmental issues attest to the ferment which will ultimately transform the political scene.

It is to these diverse stirrings that John W. Gardner

intends to appeal in the new, as yet unnamed movement which he hopes to launch later this month. Mr. Gardner is the paradigm of the concerned private citizen who finds himself compelled by conscience and conviction to become increasingly active in political affairs. A professor who became a foundation executive, he was chosen for his expertness in education to serve as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. Experience in the Cabinet convinced him of the need to involve community leaders in an attack on a wide range of social problems. That brought him to leadership of the Urban Coalition.

But, sooner or later, community action leads into politics. Unless the men who control the levers of political authority can be impelled to act, to appropriate money, to keep programs moving in the right directions, private efforts are often dissipated and eventually frustrated. Political leadership alone cannot save a city or a nation, but neither can the citizens save themselves if their elected leaders are apathetic, inferior or corrupt.

There has to be a constant tension between the leaders and the led, between the programs and strategies of political activists and the values and ideals of ordinary citizens. When that tension goes slack, when the leaders seem out of touch with their constituencies, when Congress is becalmed by a stagnant seniority system, when local government units are ill-suited to the burdens imposed on them, then it is time for political renewal. This is such a time.

The disintegrating forces in the nation are terrifyingly strong. Mr. Gardner enters politics not in any spirit of crusading optimism but out of an almost desperate concern that the multiple conflicts—between old and young, between races, between opponents and supporters of the Vietnam war, between radicals and hardhats—may tear American society apart, irreparably.

The aim of Mr. Gardner's effort is not to found a new party or win a particular campaign. It is to rally the moderates and stop the process of polarization. His hope is to freshen the springs of political life, to recruit new talent for both parties and at every level of government, to concentrate attention on the issues that are genuinely significant, to sponsor needed reforms. It is a bold and ambitious undertaking which Mr. Gardner and his colleagues are attempting. Self-government lives by that kind of boldness and ambition.

Common Cause: Worth Some Speculating

John Gardner says, "Many people today recognize that national priorities must be changed, but they don't know how to go about it. They are shocked by the facts of poverty and pollution and inadequate housing, but they don't know what to do."

John Gardner, who was Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare under President Johnson, and who more recently headed the Urban Coalition (a group formed in the aftermath of the disturbing big city riots of the spring of 1968), thinks he knows how to go about it.

He is leading an effort to organize something called "The Common Cause." It will be a citizens lobby, non-partisan, to "speak and act in behalf of legislation to solve the nation's problems."

Gardner has been mentioned by some as a possible dark horse for a presidential nomination in 1972.

But we would like to think that "The Common Cause" is not a preliminary to a presidential nomination try, although admittedly it could be a very effective preliminary.

Gardner is working on the theory that if enough citizens are on record as believing that the nation had better do something about its poverty, its pollution and its poor housing before it does anything else, that it is

more likely that the nation's power structures will turn more decisively in these directions, power structures being responsive to power.

And the "Common Cause," if it turns out to be what Gardner wants it to be, will be a true citizens lobby: "A lobby concerned not with the advancement of special interests but with the well being of the nation."

Plans are now underway to contact a group of 200,000 citizens and ask them each to buy a charter membership.

It isn't explained just how the initial 200,000 citizens are to be chosen. It could turn into a sort of prestige thing: Were you, then, asked to join The Common Cause?

But we hope it will be more than that. The whole idea smacks something of idealism. But it also smacks of a very positive try at doing on a "citizen" basis what is already effectively done by special interest groups, albeit special interest groups made up of "citizens" too.

The initial fee to join is \$15, and, asked or not, it sounds worth it.

Who knows, it just might work. And if it did, that \$15 just might be the best investment of a couple of lifetimes.

—The Oak Ridger,
Oak Ridge, Tennessee



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2100 M STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037

John W. Gardner, Chairman

(202) 293-1530

Dear Friend:

I would like to ask you to join me in forming a new, independent, nonpartisan organization to help in rebuilding this nation. It will be known as Common Cause. It will not be a third party but a third force in American life, deriving its strength from a common desire to solve the nation's problems and revitalize its institutions of government.

There is so much that needs to be done. There are so few who are properly organized to do it. We must end the war. We must bring about a drastic change in national priorities. We must renew our attack on poverty and discrimination. And we must keep at it until we build a new America.

I know many of you share my concern and my deep sense of urgency. We must act now. We must demand more of ourselves and much, much more of our leaders. We must shake up and renew outworn institutions.

Common Cause offers you the opportunity.

Many people today recognize that national priorities must be changed, but they don't know how to go about it. They are shocked by the facts of poverty and pollution and inadequate housing, but they don't know what to do.

The first thing Common Cause will do is to assist you to speak and act in behalf of legislation designed to solve the nation's problems. We are going to build a true "citizens' lobby" -- concerned not with the advancement of special interests but with the well-being of the nation. We will keep you up-to-date on crucial issues before Congress. We will suggest when and where to bring pressure to bear.

One of our aims will be to revitalize politics and government. The need is great. State governments are mostly feeble. City government is archaic. The Congress of the United States is in grave need of overhaul. The parties are virtually useless as instruments of the popular will. We can no longer accept such obsolescence.

Most parts of the system have grown so rigid that they cannot respond to impending disaster. They are so ill-designed for contemporary purposes that they waste taxpayers' money, mangle good programs and frustrate every good man who enters the system.

The solutions are not mysterious. Any capable city councilman, state legislator, party official, or Member of Congress can tell you highly practical steps that might be taken tomorrow to make the system more responsive. But there has been no active, powerful, hard-hitting constituency to fight for such steps. We can provide that kind of constituency.

Skeptics say "But you can't really change such things." The Congress of the United States has changed in dramatic ways since its founding. Why should we assume it has lost the capacity to change further?

The political parties have changed even more dramatically since the birth of the Republic. They can change again.

Common Cause is an outgrowth of the Urban Coalition Action Council. Operating under a governing board of extraordinary diversity (mayors, minority group leaders, and leaders from business, labor and the major religious groups), the Action Council proved to be astonishingly effective. The Council has worked with a variety of allies in the civil rights organizations, the labor movement, the business community, and other groups. It has participated in major legislative victories, including extension of the Voting Rights Act, passage of the Welfare Reform Bill in the House, and defeat of a measure that would have virtually ended nonpartisan voter registration programs.

In short, we know from first hand experience that citizen action can be effective. We ask you to join us in making it even more so.

I shall not attempt to list here all the issues with which Common Cause will be concerned. We believe there is great urgency in ending the Vietnam War on a scheduled timetable. We believe there must be a major reordering of national priorities. We believe the problems of poverty and race must be among our first concerns. We will call for new solutions in housing, employment, education, health, consumer protection, environment, family planning, law enforcement and the administration of justice.

As our membership grows, we will ask members to help in identifying priority issues.

We do not expect every member to agree with every detail of our agenda. But our governing board has learned in three years of experience that it is possible to arrive at significant proposals that will be agreed on by Americans of widely differing backgrounds.

We take the phrase "Common Cause" seriously. The things that unite us as a people are more important than the things that divide us. No particular interest group can prosper for long if the nation is disintegrating. Every group must have an overriding interest in the well-being of the whole society. It follows that our agenda must be an agenda for all Americans -- for the poor, the comfortable and those in between, for old and young, for black and white, for city dweller and farmer, for men and women.

Many of you who will receive this letter share my anger at institutions and individuals that have behaved irresponsibly. But, if we're going to focus our anger, a good place to begin is with ourselves.

We have not behaved like a great people. We are not being the people we set out to be. We have not lived by the values we profess to honor.

America is not the nation it set out to be. And we will never get back on course until we take some tough, realistic steps to revitalize our institutions. That won't be easy or comfortable. Institutions don't enjoy the process of renewal. But we had better get on with it.

In recent years we have seen altogether too much complacency, narrow self-interest, meanness of mind and spirit, irrational hatred and fear. But as I travel around the country, I see something else. I see great remaining strength in this nation. I see deeper reserves of devotion and community concern than are being tapped by present leadership. I see many, many Americans who would like to help rebuild this nation but don't know where to begin.

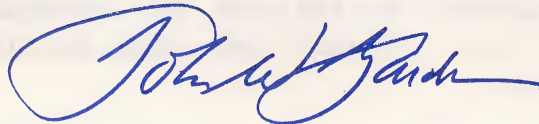
I invite you to be among the first to join us in Common Cause.

We cannot and should not depend on big contributors. The money to support our work must come from the members themselves.

We therefore ask you to enclose a check for \$15 with your membership application. Or, if you prefer, we will bill you later for that amount.

With a large and active membership we can begin to remake America.

Sincerely yours,



John W. Gardner